



Negotiating Subjectivity and Body: Access to an E-pistolary Corporeality

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The interplay between absence and presence is a prominent motif in epistolary fictions. The epistles are the field where the actual and corporeal bodies of the interlocutors are absent, yet are experienced as present, through imagination nurtured by the two parties as well as through rhetorical strategies and cultural practices. Additionally, this illusion of presence is magnified when the technological infrastructure runs smoothly and functionally to disembody itself so that authentic and immediate images of the writers can be generated. As such, the mail, be it electronic or snail mail, always writes an interaction between presence and absence, human and technology, materiality and discursivity. These thematic topics are registered and negotiated in the two email novels,¹ *The Metaphysical Touch* (1998) by Sylvia Brownrigg and *The Correspondence Artist* (2011) by Barbara Browning. Through employing email as “the communicative features that generate narration” (Keskinen 383), the two novels recontextualise epistolary practices in the burgeoning digital environment and explore the shifting meaning of presence and absence under new technological conditions. The focus of this analysis of e-pistolary lies in the tensions between discursivity and materiality, when writing and information technology converge in the literary space. However, instead of resolving these tensions, this paper examines how print literature is affected by digital modes of inscription both textually and materially. This paper pursues two central inquiries through the reading of the two novels: 1) how email, along with other forms of electronic writings, redefines concepts of authorship and textualities; 2) how new technologies structure and reconfigure our perceptions of the body.

Despite much critical attention that e-pistolary fiction attracts, analyses mostly deal with how emails are distinct from traditional letters and the development of email as a technology remains underex-

¹In this article, “email novels” or “e-pistolary novels” refers to works which employ email as “the communicative features that generate narration” (Keskinen 383), and which incorporate email both as a theme and as a form in the writing.

plored.² These two particular novels are chosen due to the thirteen-year gap in their publication, during the course of which significant changes in the email system and Internet had taken place which shall be registered by comparing them. N. Katherine Hayles's theorisation of digital textuality is helpful to chart the technological gap between the two novels. She suggests that information paradigm has become the dominant cultural model, and accordingly the information-theoretic terms of pattern and randomness emerge as the new epistemological mode and challenge what is now understood as the metaphysics of presence. Derrida, in the wake of Heidegger, sees all forms of Western metaphysics as the variants of this conceptual order which favours what is present, unmediated, and self-evident against what is absent, mediated, and represented (*Of Grammatology* 49–50). The present, as old as in Platonic philosophy, has long been defined as what is identical to itself instead of a representation of itself and thus becomes the measure of all values. It is not surprising then that Western philosophy, dominated by this frame of reference, is binary and hierarchically organised as well. Encountering the virtual environment, definite presence of the physical world and self-evident presence of one's corporeality are put into question and slip into the interplay between repetitive patterns and random modifications. A system depending upon pattern and randomness introduces a more dynamic and relational epistemology. The active processes of "feedback and feedforward loops" promise a higher level of complexity and mutability with pattern more versatile than presence and randomness as well as more productive than absence ("Virtual Bodies" 69–71). While the difference between *The Metaphysical Touch* and *The Correspondence Artist* has been interpreted as a shift from the presence/absence dialectic to the pattern/randomness loop here, this paper does not intend to pigeonhole either of the two texts. Instead, it would investigate how these two email novels identify the location of subjectivity and the location of the body and how the two competing epistemologies registered, respectively, by the printed book and the information database, are intersectional rather than discrete.

Epistolary fiction, according to Janet Gurkin Altman, is a metaphor of literature *per se*, because "...its very *mise-en-abyme* of the

²See, for example: Sunka, Simon. *Mail-Orders: The Fiction of Letters in Postmodern Culture*. State University of New York Press, 2002; Keskinen, Mikko. "E-Pistolary and E-Loquence: Sylvia Brownrigg's *The Metaphysical Touch* as a Novel of Letters and Voices in the Age of E-mail Communication." *Critique*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2004, pp. 383–404; Tokizane, Sanae. "Epistolary of Email." *Exegesis*, vol. 22, 2016, pp. 142–56. These writings work in depth on the synchronic interplay between creative writings and email technology *of a specific time* yet emphasising less on the diachronic dimension.

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writer-reader relationship” (212) mimics the complex dynamics caught in writing and reading. Not only does the receiver of a letter engages in an anticipatory and interpretative work, that is, not unlike a common reader, the receiver and the sender always exchange their roles in their communication. Letters reproduced in literary forms are often represented as intertexts, requiring both the interlocutors to retrace their references to other letters, people, and social contexts to make sense of their contents. Writings about letters can be a site where readers and writers wrestle with each other for their authority and thus a particular domain to contest notions of authorship and subjectivity. Email, as a new epistolary form, while maintaining a *mise-en-abyme* structure, further ventures into cyberspace where the landscapes of identities are reshaped. The compressed time of waiting and, by implication, more immediate exchange of emails allows a more frequent swapping of the roles. Just as traditional epistolary novels shed light on literature and authorship, e-pistolary illuminates the dual process of digital textualities and (post)human subjectivities.

The Metaphysical Touch depicts the use of emails and online discussion groups at their earlier stage, where one could find the competing values of materialism and idealism come into play. The relationship between the two protagonists, Emily Piper (nicknamed Pi) and JD, is from the outset based on email correspondence and is never “actualised” in the “real world.” Email, as suggested by Esther Milne’s book title, is a “technolog[y] of presence” for both characters, which is capable of projecting a sense of embodied intimacy from the other’s absence. By virtue of this complexity of presence and absence, *The Metaphysical Touch* defines a particular e-pistolary textuality and stages how the notions of authorship are negotiated online and in turn offline.

Although Pi and JD never meet in person, their lives share considerable common ground. Pi suffers the loss of all her belongings in the Oakland-Berkeley firestorm of 1991, including her ongoing PhD thesis on Kant’s idealism, all her beloved books, and the apartment she used to stay in. JD, on the other hand, is “fired” from his job and consequently loses his means of livelihood. Both of them see writing online as a therapeutic exercise. Traumatized by the fire, Pi dislikes any printed materials, thus the less tangible email becomes a permissible way to restore her connection with the external world. Her first encounter with JD is through an online literature discussion group in which JD posts a series of prolonged “Diery” (which puns on “die” and “diary”) about his plan to commit suicide and shares his daily life before carrying out his plan. Their email correspondence starts with Pi’s attempt to approach JD who responds in the name of “Hamlet.”

Their conversations are, however, abruptly put to an end by JD's unilateral decision to unplug. Unlike JD who refuses to meet Pi in person, Pi gradually feels an urge to initiate an offline relationship. Hence, she drives towards JD's last claimed destination, the city of Los Angeles during the 1992 Rodney King riots, only to find out that he died in a crash while embroiled in a police car chase.

Given Pi's impossibility to see him in the flesh, JD becomes a purely textual being for her, arising from electronic forms of writings. His frail existence is exacerbated as the whole story is narrated from Pi's perspective, which leaves no physical trace of JD outside his "Diery" and emails. In this "virtual" condition, JD seems to incarnate the digital itself. The rapid flow of data through digital information systems leads to the unprecedented compression and reconfiguration of time and space so that "the time taken for a message to traverse [the] distance reduces to a period experienced by the receiver, and the sender as negligible" (Stratton 254). As a result, cyberspace is often considered to nurture a disembodied presence and an immediate experience. In their early correspondence, Pi is particularly interested in "how absence of body can sometimes have no effect on the presence of a person in someone's life" (256). This presence, for Pi, is not his physical existence, but is an effect constituted by double processes of dematerialisation: the invisibility of his bodily presence and obscuring of material communication medium.

Pi forms a dynamic relationship with the email. At first, she appreciates the lightness and intangibility of email—the message sent will disappear rather than fixate on papers (124). The email for her is something in-between, "neither voice nor paper, neither pure mind nor pure matter" (Ibid.). This quality comforts Pi who is also in an intermediate status. To highlight her ghostly presence, when Pi first writes to JD, she claims to be the ghost of one of JD's dogs crushed to death by a car (199). Afterwards, when JD is stalked offline by a fanatic reader of "Diery," her attitude grows ambivalent, worrying about the degree of public access and induced unsafety in the cyberspace, despite her own optimism about its capacity to establish intimate and personal relationships. With her gradually recovering from her apprehension about materiality, her desire to "press the flesh" (276)—not the keyboard—grows stronger. She signs her last email to JD with her real name, Pi. She no longer remains satisfied with her virtual persona but needs her physical presence to be recognised by her correspondent. But the email gets rejected by JD's mailbox whose service has been stopped. The email ruthlessly bounces back to her, confirming her growing mistrust of immaterial presence. Pi's adherence to the distinction between words on page and words on screen remains unchanged.

The physicality of paper or book guarantees the materiality of printed texts as well as the present body behind the text; whereas words on screen only produce an imaginary presence which will ultimately slip into absence. Recognising digital words' inability to transfer messages constituting affective and bodily content, Pi finally overcomes her graphophobia, restores her conviction in print and, by implication, her belief in life's material substance. In the end, she returns to Berkeley Hills and fills her room with books again.

For Pi, the opposition between paper and screen is equal to the dichotomy between the material and the ideational. Setting Pi as a philosophy student working on idealism at Berkeley, *The Metaphysical Touch* navigates its reader to read it as a criticism of idealist philosophy by revisiting the imagination of presence in epistolary mode. In traditional epistolary discourse, an ideal model of communication is one that exists outside "a medium, context or vehicle" to evoke the idea of immediacy and intimacy (Milne 12). The immateriality of the medium conditions a spontaneous correspondence, while moments of dysfunction always betray material limitations thwarting genuine communication. This desire to eclipse the medium seems to come true with the coming of cyberspace which is feasible to facilitate "a flowing stream from mind to mind" (Carey 203). Critical of traditional epistolary ethics that privilege spirituality over corporeality and immateriality over materiality, *The Metaphysical Touch* relocates one's self-identity in one's body and material life, in lieu of "virtual" cyberspace. In this gesture, *The Metaphysical Touch* reworks these binaries by inversion, valorising materialism over idealism and bodily-being over virtual presence. The risk of this representation is that we can only choose between two polarities and in what follows we are still trapped within the same opposition we rebut. After his death, Pi logs onto JD's account in the discussion group and composes "The Last Installment" of the "Diery" in its author's voice. Performing as JD's ghost, Pi recounts JD's last moment before the lethal car accident and transcribes a piece of JD's diary in the postscript written on paper when he was nineteen years old. The diary records an adolescent experience about the instinct to live which overcomes his juvenile wish to exit the world, stopping him from drowning himself. In her "ghost-writing," Pi only reveals her existence once, saying that this person who is channeling JD's words wants to "make sure this got into print" (386).

Paradoxically, what she does is against JD's "will" in his last posted "Diery." JD writes that he values "the ambiguous in narrative" and therefore leaves his "Diery" without a definite conclusion (357). Yet Pi overwrites JD's last post regardless of his wish to convey her conviction in print and belief in life's materiality. The possessive

frame of paper is a concrete location for one's coherent identity: instead of the JD online, she wants to retain singular access to "that person in print" to whom she feels attracted (313). At an earlier point, Pi demonstrates a distaste for the "universal access" offered by the Internet: "She didn't want anyone else reading [JD's 'Diery']". She wanted JD to herself" (189). Through posting "The Last Installment" in the name of JD, Pi denies other people's access to him and thereby claims her exclusive ownership. She not only hijacks his online account, but also becomes the executor of his property including his books. In this sense, JD's identity is encoded as his property which can be appropriated, transferred, and above all, be perceived as a coherent entity to be possessed.

Underlying this claim is the model of "possessive individualism" that defines the self as a self-owned property. This understanding constructs one as autonomous, coherent, and identical with oneself raising from a set origin and as fundamentally distinct from others. Abercrombie et al. recognise this claim to self-ownership as "a form of authorization" that we are entitled to be "the author and topic" of our own story (33). The self-possessive individual as the authority of one's biography resembles a concept of the author in the traditional sense of the term as the origin of meaning of his or her works. In a similar fashion, to acquire possession of JD's identity is to become the author of his work for Pi, and subsequently the author of him.

Quoting JD's diary within her "Diery," Pi inevitably enacts the violence inherent in the quotation. In her discussion of Derrida's works of remembrance to his friends, Jane Gallop maintains that the act of quoting the words of a departed friend necessarily involves violent truncation, because "[e]ven if we do not interfere, interrupt, or comment, we still decide where the quotation begins and ends" (78). The violence of quotation is quite indecent but inevitable, otherwise one would either abandon the friend by isolating him within his own words or let the friend disappear through substituting his voice with that of oneself. What Pi does is a reversal. By typing "THE END" (389) to conclude both her citing of JD's diary and her own writing, she finishes "The Last Installment" with a definite, irreversible conclusion which consequently freezes, frames, and fixes JD's "Diery" and his exit from the world. She denies the universal access he provides to people and enfold his presence within the frame of paper—an institution of stability and possessive identity. Moreover, *The Metaphysical Touch* is also the title of the fictive book JD suggested that Pi (nicknamed Sylvia Plath) could write on how human relations are reconfigured through electronic lines (311). To think of *The Metaphysical Touch* as the outcome of "getting into print" is to think of Pi/Sylvia

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(“Plath” or Brownrigg) as the author of the novel who, by signing her name on it, becomes “the author” of JD’s “story.”

There are two epistolary forms that Pi includes, namely JD’s autobiographical “Diery”/diary and the emails among them. Traditionally, diaries vary from letters since the former evokes “an intensity of privacy, cloistering, isolation” (Abbott 11), whereas the letter, with its nature of exchange, signifies openness, incompleteness, and interaction of a dialogue. Online “Diery” invalidates this distinction through the “universal access” it grants. Nevertheless, Pi closes the boundary of these two open forms of writing by cloistering both its writer and the text. Her signature functions as the source and proof of authorship and authority, which proportionately suppresses other writings enveloped within it, contributing to JD’s disappearance instead of a possible co-emerging identity. Through posting “The Last Installment,” Pi also puts the common territory of epistolary imagination, originally shared by JD and her, under her (copy)right. Marilyn Schuster interprets Pi’s writing JD’s final blog as revenge for his refusal to meet her in his last letter. The act of appropriation is “...an ironic twist on the epistolary tradition in which so many men write letters in the voices of women” (Schuster 34–35). Indeed, the institution of gender implicated in the ideology of authorship is a generic aspect of epistolary discourse (Kauffman 19). Yet the problem remains that even if the male author is to be displaced with the female author, it ironically confirms the dichotomy of author and text, creator and the created, owner and the owned. Brownrigg’s model of reinstating materialism and the necessity of a physical presence falls into the “metaphysics of presence” where one term is conceptualised as superior to the other in a hierarchical system of binary oppositions. By linking idealism to absence, disembodiment and mediacy, materialism to presence, and embodiment and immediacy, identities of the two correspondents are under the authoritarian language of ownership and are mutually exclusive.

The perilous dichotomy of presence and absence is illustrated by the opposition between the page and the screen, the old and the new medium. The new technology is inadequate to generate a sense of presence and authenticity compared to paper-based writing which bears a direct imprint of an author authoring oneself. For centuries, paper has “instituted the experiences of identifying with oneself” as the place of “becoming a subject in law” (Derrida, “Paper” 56). The paper page, with its regulation of format and order, its immobile and impermeable surface, is culturally assumed to be a concrete locus of an author(ial) subjectivity. In line with *The Metaphysical Touch*, one may conclude that it is not possible for digital technologies to navigate productive subjectivity different from the paper-based possessive identity.

Yet it would be early to conclude that the affiliations between print and real, digital and simulated, are a descriptive fact. It is but a “cultural perception” informed by the dichotomy of material and information (Hayles, “Condition” 183). This dichotomy is underpinned by “the older and more traditional dichotomy of spirit/matter” (Ibid. 186) and can map onto the opposition between the ideational and the material. What generates this perception and Pi’s retroactive nostalgia towards the analogue (paper and telephone) is inseparable from the material condition of the Internet service at the time. Pi connects to the internet through dial-up internet access which works through the telephone network. Marked by the incompatibility between telephone lines and Internet access, an antagonistic relationship between the analogue and the digital, the material and the immaterial can be alluring. Yet, the rapid development of telecommunication signalling methods constantly renegotiates our cultural perceptions and our understanding of the self.

More than a decade after *The Metaphysical Touch*, *The Correspondence Artist* was published in 2011. The twenty-first century witnesses a sea change in the form and use of email alongside the development of telecommunications devices and the Internet. While the quality of message bears many similarities to traditional letters in terms of their style and volume in *The Metaphysical Touch*; the popularity of mobile phones such as Blackberry in *The Correspondence Artist* encourages a shift to increasing colloquialism, smaller display, and greater handiness. Accordingly, the text of an email appears to be more editable, less materially resistant, and always ready for being recycled and reused. The email becomes permeable both in our way of accessing it and editing it. Such a technological development further mobilises the possessive identity fixed within the physical presence of paper, such as the Author or possibly “the Owner.”

The strong opposition between absence and presence in epistolary practice is also modified by quasi-spontaneity and prevalent accessibility of email on the phone. Presence is normality and absence is now absent. Neither absence nor presence interests Vivian, the protagonist in *The Correspondence Artist*. When she is unable to get in touch with her lover, she imagines four fictional ‘paramours’ to approximate to her lover whose etymology Vivian believes to be “...something approximating, and yet distinct from, love” (118). Therefore, what is highlighted is no longer immediacy, authenticity, and self-ownership— notions owing much to the metaphysics of presence, but rather concepts of multiplicity, mutability and access—qualities of an information database. *The Correspondence Artist* depicts such a metonymic multi-presence or para-presences from two perspectives.

Firstly, it upsets the logic of functionality through cultivating the email's "playful dysfunctionality" which draws attention to not just the message but also to its medium. Secondly, it deconstructs the fictional concept of ownership through employing database-like narrative which underscores random access over exclusive possession. As a secret lover to an internationally acclaimed artist whose name cannot be disclosed, Vivian creates four fictional lovers and four versions of epistolary romance all involving a same basic plot based on what is claimed to have happened. In her para-stories, Vivian develops romantic relationships with Tzipi, a 68-year-old Nobel-prize winning Israeli female novelist; Santutxo, a legendary male Basque separatist; Binh, a Swedish-Vietnamese digital artist in his early twenties; and Djeli, a Bambara griot and a rock star. Vivian divulges the story of their relationships through both real-life meetings and email correspondence—be it successful or failed. On one occasion, an email from a paramour is trapped by the automatic spam filter. Her oblivion about that their planned meeting location has been changed results in her being attacked by Tzipi's Medusa-like ex-girlfriend on Mykonos; being kidnapped by Basque anarchists against Santutxo; masturbating in loneliness Propeller Island City Lodge—a hotel and an art installation in Berlin; being infected with dengue fever in Bamako. Each version of the story explicitly names its intertextual reference, from Greek mythology to an art project, from Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus* and Marx Brothers' *Monkey Business* to William Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* and its theatrical adaptation. Offering fourfold versions of one story, four paramours, and abundant intertextual references, *The Correspondence Artist* appears to be a synthesis constituted through selecting, combining, and recycling atomic data from a series of narrative database. Vivian acknowledges that "this novel was constructed out of some fairly questionable knowledge gleaned from Google, a small, arbitrary stack of library books, a few Netflix DVDs, and my bin of sent e-mails" (139). These are databases which structure and underpin her narrative, as they structure and underpin our everyday lives.

Database, as Lev Manovich indicates, has become the "cultural form" of the computer age, which "...represents the world as a list of items and...refuses to order this list" (29) Database structure reformulates the semiotic theory of syntagm and paradigm. The syntagmatic dimension of language structures a sentence through a sequential arrangement of signifiers and relates to presence since the constituent elements of an utterance physically exist. The paradigmatic dimension, on the other hand, pertains to vertical organisation of an utterance based on selection and choice of one over the other as a result of an imaginary process within writer's and reader's minds (Ibid. 33–34).

Manovich argues that new media remodels their relationship in the sense that paradigm (database) is externalised and is “privileged over syntagm (narrative)” (Ibid.). This is because the database is an assembly of narrative units and becomes the basis of the narrative constructed through accessing the database and linking these units in a specific order. The shift from creating a narrative to selecting among existing data makes explicit the material existence of the database. Accordingly, the word “material” is no longer appropriate, and it should be replaced by “different degrees of virtuality” instead (Ibid.).

By emphasising “degrees of virtuality,” Manovich introduces a supplementary connection between the two, which resembles the interplay of pattern and randomness. The intrusion of random noises in recognisable patterns does not necessarily invalidate the original information, but “...can cause [the system] to reorganize at a higher level of complexity” (Hayles, “Virtual Bodies” 70). When dysfunction of the email service—an important email blocked by the spam filter—takes place in *The Correspondence Artist*, while the original expectation is frustrated, adventurous experiences in a network of intertextual narrative events proliferate. Dysfunction ceases to be a nuisance as it is under “the logic of functionality” or technological solutionism which “aspires to erase uncertainty” (de Vries 20). For Emma de Vries, epistolary modes inspired by new media—what she coins “neo-epistolary” works—follow a “logic of dysfunctionality” embracing contingency as a self-reflexive practice and a productive force (17–21). Dysfunction in narrative, that is, incompatibility among four paths of narrative, does not require the reader to conclude a linear, coherent account of story. One does not have to conclude that an event is not true because it contradicts with another narrative. Multiple possibilities run parallel to each other in *The Correspondence Artist*, urging us to multiply the stories instead of harmonising them. The focus shifts from contradiction to symbiotic interactions, with the dichotomy between presence and absence disabled by our equal accessibility to those data-events. Foregrounding pattern and randomness, the database structure of *The Correspondence Artist* operates this animate logic of dysfunctionality through recontextualising single narrative data, blending contingent narrative events and finally traversing narrative frames. Enacting a database, the novel is devoid of a stable content but rather grants access to multiflorous contents. When Vivian receives an email from Djeli about him hunting down mosquitoes, she replies with a photo of a webpage displaying Chéri Samba’s painting *Lutte contre les moustiques* (79). Apart from the painting itself, we can see its exterior frames, including Mac OS X system, Firefox browser—technological appliances providing the condition for access, and the URL—direct access to the picture. The URL, seemingly dominated by the logic of

dysfunctionality, was dead. Another link on the flap of cover of the novel, <http://www.thecorrespondenceartist.com/>, is still functioning. The link leads to a website about the novel, presented as Barbara Browning's blog. Each paramour has a personal page on which Browning talks about how she comes to write these characters and offers extra information about them that is not mentioned within the constraints of the textual frame. Moreover, in these blogs, we are offered more hyperlinks to relevant Wikipedia pages and YouTube videos uploaded by accounts in the names of the four paramours. There is, for instance, Tzipi's interview in audio and Djeli's instrumental cover of a song. Through these YouTube pages, more links emerge. Our attention is first drawn by other videos made by these "uploaders," and then to YouTube's "Next to play" list. Ultimately, we are thrown into the enormous database of the Internet to view, search, and navigate. The fixed and cloistered structure of printed book is made proliferative and sprawling through a database of references, information, images. Hence, the book moves beyond being just an 'imitation' of database. It becomes an actual database, both online and offline.

The transmedial narrative structure of the novel also calls a halt to the authoritarian opposition between copyright and plagiarism, between ownership and appropriation. The intra-textual narrative of the novel is composed of three layers. The first layer accommodates emails written by Vivian and her paramour. In the second, Vivian narrates her epistolary romance with the four paramours. The third tier is not exhibited until the last chapter when another narrator claims to be the author of Vivian's story and states her non-correspondence with Vivian's narrative voice (168). Beyond these three layers, there is the extra-textual writer, Barbara Browning, who puts her signature on the top of the book. The hierarchy of these four tiers of author-character relationship is nevertheless porous. Apart from the fictional paramours, Vivian also acknowledges that she fabricates some emails. For instance, there is a photograph of a split beef heart on a piece of china that she claims to be a message from Binh. Later, however, Vivian admits that she is the actual photographer and sender (167). This meta-fictional trope mobilises the boundary between the first layer (the emails) and the second (the narration), with the risk of granting Vivian author(ity). The intrusion of another narrative voice implied to be Barbara Browning removes this risk by indicating that what we are reading is not a *roman à clé* and, in turn, suspends Vivian's narration. This new narrator declares that Vivian does not correspond to her, which also leaves her own voice's coherence with Browning dubious (168). If we could not trust Vivian's narration, why should we give credit to this new first-person narrator? Above all, the presence of the "actual

author,” Barbara Browning, who possesses a higher level of presence, necessarily suppresses these fictional characters.

Insofar as being connected to the Internet, *The Correspondence Artist* maintains an open structure that resists anchoring Browning to an authorial position. The four paramours as characters always exceed the fixed narrative frame because they have their personal YouTube accounts. Santutxo uploads a video in which he appears in a mask, declaring that he has never had dinner with Slavoj Žižek. This fictional character not only underscores the tenuous nature of the published novel but also disassociates himself from a public figure and hence plays with the convention which stratifies presence and absence, the creator and the created (by citing his video and putting his name in bibliography, the paper also participates in this border-crossing game). Moreover, each paramour uploads videos containing felicitating messages to Browning in the description column. In each account, there is at least one video showing Browning reading out an excerpt of her novel relevant to that paramour. By being accessed by these fictional paramours and enfolded in their published works, Browning relinquishes her authority.

The working of information and database is unveiled in competing and traversing. The claimed writer at each level of the story is soon dispossessed of authority by the words of another writer. The creator and the created—presence and absence—are shuffling their positions perpetually, fictionalising and actualising themselves all the time, moving into the more flexible interplay between pattern and randomness. Hayles attests to tremendous flexibility of language occasioned by the interaction between human and computer that “[a] signifier on one level becomes a signified on the next higher level” (Hayles, “Virtual Bodies” 77). In a similar vein, the author—and the transcendental signified of his or her work—at each level of the narrative, both online and offline, will always be interwoven into another strand of narrative. What frustrates authorial claims in every tier of the narration and renders them “flickering” is the equal and random accessibility of the reader to information in and of the novel as a database where “...every item has the same significance as any other” (Manovich 80). Readers are offered multiple coexistent versions of a story, not just pathways towards one original story. We discern the narrative through these provided materials, yet the outcome will never be an overwhelming presence, but rather selection and combination of data, replication of patterns following algorithms, and intrusion of randomness to add complexities to repetition. When all narrative elements, including the author, are informationalised into atomic narrative data, the master narrative of authorship is de-emphasised. As a result, the database

structure of *The Correspondence Artist* creates ambiguity around the distinction between presence and absence. The narrative springs from a single, configured storyline to generate meaning. On the other hand, the arbitrary selection and reuse of intertextual data, their equal accessibility, and the open structure of the novel mimic the recombinant and proliferative nature of a database. Therefore, *The Correspondence Artist* does not lay stress on a fantasy of electronic media's adequacy to generate a sense of presence as long as it functions perfectly. When dysfunction takes place to frustrate a correspondence, the novel shows how errors can be playful and contribute to a higher level of complexity, for example, connecting adventurous forking paths of narrative to the infinite online network.

The two novels therefore demonstrate a tension between authorial control and database structure. Email communication in *The Metaphysical Touch* paradoxically urges Pi to relocate the self in analogue technologies and ultimately in the book which she considers to be empirical and thus ever-present. Her authorial imprint empowers her to overwrite the dominant patriarchal voices in epistolary tradition with a female voice, yet falls back to the metaphysics of presence, in reversion. With the development of the Internet and the popularity of digital cell phones, the analogue is transformed into binary codes in transmission, and access becomes accessible anywhere and anytime. The location of the self, accordingly, is shifted to a database which grants a higher level of mobility, flexibility, and complexity which upsets binary oppositions. The database subjectivity, therefore, shares much commonplace with, and can be more radical than, a postmodern subjectivity that privileges the *parole* of the people over the *langue* of the authority, equality in the form of data over hierarchy in terms of authenticity, open access over exclusive ownership. The posthuman subjectivity fed on digitalisation and a database structure poses a question regarding the perception of human bodies: if our subjectivities in the information society mimic and inhabit a database, is it the same case for our bodies? New media technologies acquaint us with dematerialisation and rematerialisation of the body. The constitution of the body becomes uncertain with the production of a databody that is prosthetic and even marketable as bodily parts. The databody then informs an interest in the irreducibility and immediacy of the lived body as an index and the physical locus of the self and hand as a motif that produces embodied experiences.

After the firestorm, Pi suspends all connection to her friends at Berkeley and takes shelter at Abbie's house in Mendocino. Yet, her colleague manages to send her a modem, accompanied by a handwritten message: "...HINT: the non-referential meaning of this gift is:

keep in touch” (9). Pi cries while reading the message. Touch as an important motif in the novel is both metaphysical and physical. It connotes a symbolic sense of contact through epistolary communication and concomitantly has the physical capacity of evoking bodily reaction. *The Metaphysical Touch* deals with these two categories of touch and how the virtual presence deriving from email correspondence can or cannot foster a kind of tactile, physical bound between the sender and the recipient. The modem indicates the potential of cyberspace to suture together the ideational and the material, to touch upon both body and mind. Pi’s perception of her own body shares a similar trajectory with her understanding of the digital medium—shifting from an idealist position to a materialist one. Prior to the fire, Pi views the philosophical world as a retreat from her (female) body, because it allows her access to be purely rational as against her “pale tall body” and “the breasts and hips and thighs of it” (34). Loss of her material life in the fire further adds to the physical forms’ unbearable weight and encourages her rapport with the digital which is less substantial. Instead of substitution of her mental life, the digital obtains an ambiguous status as “neither pure mind nor pure matter” (124), which connects her body to her mind. A change in Pi’s body can be observed when she begins to write to JD as despite Pi’s feigned indifference to her corporeality, her “body managed still to speak” (231). The virtual communication inevitably calls forth embodied investment.

It is curious how emails can form an embodied experience in the same way as traditional epistolary practices with their immateriality. While letters are always handwritten, tangible documents reminding the recipient that there is always a body behind them, email, in its digital medium, is intangible and lacks individual marks sustained by handwriting. Altman summarises two modes of presence arising from letters. The letter becomes a *metaphor* of the writer when the writer performs images of himself through the letter and the recipient conjures up images of the writer from it. The *metonymic* presence of the writer, on the other hand, is when the letter directly represents a tangible body, say, when a lover kisses the letter received as if he or she is kissing the sender (Altman 19). However, email eliminates this metonymic and material presence established throughout the letter’s physicality, as Mikko Keskinen states, “the ultimate immaterial e-mail message remains untouched by both the addressor and the addressee” (386). Keskinen’s analysis describes Pi’s encounter with the computer screen, as all electronic epistles in *The Metaphysical Touch* are represented without direct reference to the material process of writing and detached from its external frames, to constitute a sense of immediacy and insubstantiality. However, by linking a scarcity of materiality directly to the absence of correspondents’ fleshly bodies in computer-

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mediated communication, Keskinen overlooks tactility arising from vision and the materiality of email. Email, in its digital medium, obtains corporeality and tactility through establishing a flow between the optical and the physical. Both Pi and JD recognise the need to include idioms of the visual to describe letters on screen:

You can tell me more about your bibliophobia, too, if you want. I'm all ears. A phrase that seems inaccurate in this context; I guess I should say I'm all eyes. (219)

I don't want to pry, but I want you to know that this particular correspondent of yours is all eyes... (250)

Listen. (With your eyes, I mean. Listen with your eyes.) (289)

Instead of a “[hiatus] between visuality and intangibility,” which assumes the immateriality of email, these “body words” and emphasis on visuality act as a reminder of the physical dimension in correspondence (Keskinen 390). Repeated references to human organs, though largely metaphorically, also allude to the corporeal existence of the two correspondents. Moreover, all these “eye contacts” ensue highly emotionally charged writings concerning confessional statements or traumatic memory. Eyes, in this sense, are an organ of touch. It is through visually drawn connectivity that Pi and JD start “[g]etting in touch” (147)—the title of Pi’s post on the discussion group to ask the way to approach JD—and grow a virtual rapport with each other. In this light, email is capable of being touched and touching upon the correspondents’ bodies in its own visual way.

Email, visually displayed on screen as a “text-as-image” against “materially resistant text” with its interactive nature is able to carve a haptic visuality between the screen and the reader and between the sender and the recipient (Hayles, “Virtual Bodies” 71). I would like to borrow Laura U. Marks’s depiction of an embodied and inter-subjective spectatorship in cinematic experience to describe a similar economy of looking in Pi’s online correspondence where human “tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive functions” (2) are drawn together, which enables an embodied perception where the viewer becomes the surface of herself and responds to “...the video as to another body and to the screen as another skin” (4).³ This reciprocal touch allows one to sense the physicality of the object as well as the embodiment of oneself. Pi, who feels that “[t]he hopes of her body had burned right out of

³While Marks mainly engages with filmic images, email bears a resemblance to haptic images in terms of their interactive nature and immersive visual experience.

her” (86), re-embodies herself through the tactile quality of JD’s email: when Pi receives the first email from JD, “her pale face pinken and her blue eyes grow genuinely bigger” (230) as if she is brought back to life from her ghostly status. The email correspondence to JD brings forth her gradual revitalisation, that is, recovery of her contact with the physical world. This explains why Pi’s emails with JD are often accompanied by bodily intimacy between her and Abbie. In Abbie’s earlier attempts to toy with Pi, the incoming email always interrupts their affinity. Beeping notifications from the computer excite Pi more than the caress of Abbie’s hand (Ibid.). However, when seeing her own email bouncing back (313), Pi encounters the disembodied nature of cyberspace and of “the metaphysical touch” whose haptic visuality is unable to reunite the body and the mind, and one body with another. The physicality of email and the possibility for it to re-embodiment Pi spring from a kind of indexical bond between the sender and the recipient. Curious about the noticing sound, Abbie asks, “What? What is it?” Pi answers, “It’s Hamlet” (230). The email is not just from Hamlet (JD) but also Hamlet himself. This metaphoric and indexical relation assumed by Pi is critical for the haptic quality of their correspondence and JD’s presence. Therefore, coming across the abrupt breakdown of this indexical connection with JD, she soon enters into an intimate relationship with Abbie.

Their bodies drawing closer together and a person’s legs (Pi’s) wrapped around the waist of the other (Abbie), pulling that nice waist closer and warmer while the kiss kissed and the mouths opened and a hand moved through another’s hair (Abbie’s) and another hand touched lightly a knotted shoulder (Pi’s) and someone uttered something like a moan. (322)

The physical touch draws two bodies together. Intimacy and congruity are established through a shared physical existence—a body shared by all human beings with “legs,” “waist,” “hair,” and “shoulder.” Moreover, the elision of boundaries between bodies can be witnessed when the possessive expressions highlighting the body’s singularity and referentiality finally dissolve into an infinite pronoun, “someone.” The two modes of touch, therefore, are inherently stratified depending on whether one can physically approach the actual object. While the metaphysical touch functions to re-materialise Pi’s body, aiding her return to the embodied reality offline, what restores her fully equipped body to rejoin the life in Berkeley is physical touch with Abbie. In this gesture, *The Metaphysical Touch* not only subverts the “man as emancipation of woman” in traditional epistolary writings but also enacts a criticism on the “body-loathing” tendency among many writers of cyberspace in which the loathed body is always attached to women.

Vicky Kirby argues that regarding cyberspace as inherently immaterial and a possibility of liberating human from its inert, carnal form is substantially sexual diacritics in which human mind is a function of masculine control that produces and prolongs culture, "...separating itself from a body feminized as its natural, dumb support" (137). The binaries explain why some people refuse to include the topic of "nature" and thus of "the feminine" within the discussion of this newly generated identity through cyberspace and why the corporeal is considered "...that residual 'something' that technology is articulated against" (Ibid.). A purely virtual being as he is, JD finally refuses to meet Pi offline and turns down her affective remarks by stating in his last email and last "Diery" that their friendship through correspondence is just "sweet meeting of minds" (312), rather than a carnal, romantic relationship (356). On the contrary, Pi demonstrates how the necessity of human bodily contact always disturbs the patriarchal illusion of self-sufficient identity on cyberspace. Recollecting her self-identity, she gradually generates a sense of the presence of her body, not just her mind. Her triumph is reflected in the sheer fact of survival as opposed to JD's death, actualised in her authorship which enfolds JD within her narrative.

The novel denounces the masculine metaphysical touch in cyberspace through showing its impotence of forming real intimacy and its lack of indexicality. The physical touch of hands and material connection to the external world is more fundamental to one's identity formation. However, the materialist stance gained by Pi relocates the feminine in the domain of nature as against that of technology symbolised by JD. Pi ultimately aligns with the corporeal, the affective, the analogue, and the actual objectifying rather than mobilising the opposition between nature and technology, feminine and masculine. Pursuers and performers of physical touch are always women, either Pi, Abbie, or JD's former colleague Gloria whose touching hand makes JD sense attraction, which upsets him because it intervenes in their purely cerebral communication (90–91). The capacity of physical touch to generate fusion and confusion that disrupt a self-possessive identity only takes places exclusively between women. It confirms the indexical traces of presence of the body and further constitutes embodied knowledge and affective experience which secure Pi's identity appropriated from JD. The body Pi occupies in the end is an essentially gendered body, whose capacity to touch is inextricable from her femininity. Corporeality is further made into the synonym for what is given and immutable, since nature is identified to be a primitive and empirical state prior to the complex process introduced by culture and technology. With her body conceptualised as the physical locus of her femininity, the mode of touch therefore serves to delineate and fixate

the border among bodies, between the Self and the Other, the female subject and the male object, rather than traversing it. Skin, in *The Metaphysical Touch*, serves as the surface and the boundary of an exclusive feminine body, just as the paper page is the impermeable boundary of the self. There is likewise a coherence between the identities and the body in *The Correspondence Artist*. Through metonymic multi-presence of the paramour, we witness the database-like, assembled subjectivity in and of the text, whose boundaries are never settled by granting access to the other, rather than a self-possessive entity. However, the notion of access becomes ambivalent when applied to the body, as it obscures the self-evidence of the corporeal, rendering it fragmented and digitised. What does it mean to have access to our body? Who has access to our body? Since ownership can be “...an assertion of self-possession and self-control, of a fundamental right to exclude others from one’s very being” (Phillips 20), that is, a claim to sovereign, self-protection against other invasive property claims, how do we live with the lacuna that this dissolution of sovereignty exposes?

The prominent consequence of viewing the body as information and thus as accessible as data is that the materiality and indexicality of body is lost, as in the case of JD as a purely textual and virtual being, framed by the permanent loss of his body by his death. However, as discussed above, this view is based on a dichotomy of body and mind, materiality and information, women and men. These old binaries map into the new territory of cyberspace in which the identity of women is located in the domain of body and nature, just as the identity of men inhabits the transcendental realm associated with mind and culture. The traditionally assumed connection between the biological and the essential must be rethought to stop treating the body as “the unmoveable and immobilizing substance” in order to renegotiate this sexual diacritic (Kirby 70). The tyrannical notions of presence and ownership are suspended and shift to the more flexible notion of access in a digital environment and through interaction with the machine. New vocabularies such as database and access nurture a way of recognising the body as malleable and performative, rather than inertial and essential. In this light, the database-like narrative and identity in *The Correspondence Artist* probes what the body, abstracted by textuality and virtualised by digital technology, speaks. It tackles this opposition between the indexical and the discursive/the digital through practising a performative way of writing. Della Pollock describes performative writing as a practice that bridges the constructed separation of language and experience, not through re-establishing referentiality, but through performance centred in the body. It recovers the corporeal and material dimension inherent in the notion of performance to challenge “...an easy identification of performativity with writing and the subse-

quent absorption of performance into textuality as performativity” (Pollock 74). The notions of database and access participate in this performative practice through mobilising the distinction between language and the body in virtual performance.

Writing in and of *The Correspondence Artist* is material and performative in the sense that the self-constitutiveness of language is dissolved by emails embedded with an awareness of writing as performance—a performative as well as a material practice. We all seem to be performers when confronting shifting life situations and perform multiple roles in various writings serving different ends. With this connection between social and linguistic performance, Meredith Love highlights the possibility of developing “...discoursal selves that displace the construct of ‘authentic writer’” (16). For example, in emails, memos, papers, and shopping lists composed by one person, it is possible to witness diversely self-performed characters, rather than an integral and coherent author. The performative way of writing thus is organised by a metonymic structure which underscores the difference rather than the indexicality between the linguistic sign and the referent. This difference testifies and dramatises the limit of language, from which the body always emerge. In her discussion of interaction between human and screen, Hayles evokes the concept of proprioceptive coherence to describe how a mature computer user can experience the keyboard as “an extension of her arm” and the screen as “a space into which her subjectivity can flow” (“Condition” 198). With the popularity of mobile phones, the bodily boundary between human and machine is further blurred as the keyboard and the screen become less divisible, as in the case of BlackBerry, or the keyboard even virtualised and displayed on the screen. It is more likely for mobile phone users to look at the keyboard and the screen at the same time, while it is impossible to do so when using a computer, be it desktop or laptop. Therefore, experienced mobile phone users are less likely to confront the dysfunctional moment, for instance, when in order to adjust the typed content, they need to find certain keys on keyboard or move their hand to use mouse or trackpad. For Vivian, her main medium for sending and receiving emails is her BlackBerry. Its high portability and easy practicability make it less an appliance outside her body, but more a prosthetic constituent. The shift from the computer to the mobile phone as the main medium for email writing, and thus to a higher level of mobility and interaction, can be seen in Vivian’s choice to send a photograph of the online digital copy of Chéri Samba’s painting on phone. When it is possible to send the URL link or only the picture to the paramour via email directly on the computer, Vivian chooses to take a photo of it and email it with her BlackBerry (79). For Vivian, her BlackBerry is not only an extension of her hands which compose

the email but also embodies her eyes which view the painting displayed on computer screen and even obtains a retentive function as the brain, archiving what she sees in a “memory stick.” For its recipient Djeli, the email on screen can serve as a proxy for eyes to look at the scene that Vivian witnesses when taking the photo and subsequently allows the recipient to occupy the same position as she does. The manual quality can be seen in the photograph’s being partial—the browser is not shot fully with its right part missing—and in its slight perspective distortion, both contributing to Vivian’s embodiment.

This mechanism of embodiment defies the indexical relation between the original, physical event and the photographic representation, between the sender and the email. After the mosquito message Vivian writes that belief in “the singular reality of any given message” is an illusion and that there is great indeterminacy in terms of the identity of the sender (Vivian, narrator as author, or Browning?), the recipient (Djeli, the paramour, or we readers?) and the content of email (81–82). She employs a “deceptive use of photograph” (167) to eclipse referentiality of language and to dissolve indexicality of photograph. There are some photos described by Vivian yet unpublished in the book. In an email, she writes, “pure or impure?...One I grew and one I bought” and appends a shot of lovely pansies she grows on the balcony and a “dirty” iris she buys (104). Vivian intertextually refers to this message in some following emails: one email contains a shot of her labia (105) and another of “two pure flowers”—a picture of morning glory from her balcony, and another of her nipple (155). The absence of these photographs, that is their sheer presence in language, seems to hollow out actuality of the object, because the discursive condition at large is always a symbolic form on a different plane from its referent. Moreover, language is slippery in these differential patterns. Those following emails obfuscate the “original” meaning of Vivian’s words—“One I grew and one I bought,” and the “original” object of these photographs. This disruption of linearity and originality allows each email, even each word, to unwrite itself, through removing the identity between the linguistic or photographic representations and their referents.

The search for the indexicality of the photographs present is often upset as well. Earlier in the novel, Vivian claims that Binh sent her a shot of a split beef heart on a piece of china, “Duong Van Binh’s Heart on a Plate.” However, she admits that she is the actual photographer, and is showing us the uncropped version in which her hand is holding the other half of the heart above the plate (167). The unveiling of such outer frame frustrates “the identification with unitary system of meaning” (Pollock 83) and at the same time destabilises the fixity of

the two frames by exposing deceptive digital retouching. Neither the object of the photograph nor its subject can be assigned with one coherent and stable meaning. Rather, they can be identified with at least two symbiotic meanings. As a result, these emails and photos play off the “singular reality” of any email, and further the self-constitutiveness of any system of representation. Yet the dissolution of an essential ground does not necessarily lead to diminishing corporeality. The body is *sensed* when we encounter the photograph with a proffering hand and a carved-up heart. Vivian (or the author-narrator) states, “That’s my hand, of course.... I, not Binh, was the one to proffer my heart on a plate. Interpret that as you will” (167). The intersection of image and text engages the reader in material sensation and tactile perception. The photograph locates the reader in the act of taking the photo. Her hands—one handling her heart, another taking the shot—touch upon the readers by allowing them to perform viewing, photographing, and retouching. We are thereby caught in a trinity of the optical, the haptic, and the digital engaging in the embodied experience offered by this encounter with her hand which is beheld and beholds, and is able to manipulate and remove indices. Besides, directly addressed in words, the reader is also turned into the offeree of her heart and thus interwoven into a bodily and affective domain. The mechanism of address, for Judith Butler, is always already reciprocal, where both bodies of addresser and addressee come into play. On the one hand, with the addresser “comporting her or his body toward the other” (2), the body of the addressee is exposed as vulnerable to such address; on the other hand, the being of the addresser is dependent on the address of the Other, always in the position of being addressed and being responded to. The image with part of the heart on the plate and the other part on her hand inevitably brings forth an offer that unequivocally demands a response—“Interpret that as you will.” The openness of her heart, together with the openness left for interpretation invites overall accessing, that is, a traversal touch. This is the point when the readers *sense* an embodied Barbara Browning ef(face)d within the photograph. Most photos are her body parts—her eye, her hand, her “heart,” which are substantially organs of touch. The eye embodies the reader with its non-indexically haptic viscosity. The hand touches and experiences the touch. The heart can be touched emotionally. In this gesture, the book of *The Correspondence Artist* becomes an assembled and fluid body of Browning herself. This embodiment of Browning is not essential and indexical to an immutable and inert body, not only because it is prosthetic, but also because it is always in “the ongoing process of (self-)production” through granting and inviting access (Pollock 87). There are certain photographic objects which are not self-portraits of Browning, including two shots of Vivian’s son, Sandro, one of his nipples which are claimed to be Binh’s in the earlier passage (69) and the

other of him kissing his girlfriend with two policemen behind them (159). Vivian employs the expression of conception to describe her relation to Sandro, because “it makes a child seem like a parent’s IDEA” (123). She has a fascinating formula of her “IDEA”:

... I don’t remember where who thought that semen could last many years in a woman’s body, so paternity could be attributed to a lover from her distant past. I find this interesting because sometimes I see in Sandro qualities of different people from my past, and it seems almost like all that semen mixed together. I like this idea.

But Sandro’s theory is that he was very lucky to be ‘fathered’ by my ‘lesbian friends’ and by a ‘crazy Mexican’ (Raul). (124)

Capitalising “IDEA,” Vivian parodies the biological claim that a child inherits parents’ DNA, playing off the boundaries between culture and nature. Her biological strand, though already a hybrid concept, intermingles with Sandro’s “theory of cultural influence,” together giving birth to Sandro who turns out to be an amalgamation of individual information units from Vivian’s romantic history, genes as biological data, and cultural cultivation. Moreover, Vivian who *conceives* Sandro is endowed with the capacity of accessing her own past to conceive a new and assembled IDEA, promising a “coperformance” of the ideational and the material, of the mind and the body (Pollock 81). Is not *The Correspondence Artist* also a conception of Barbara Browning, a synthesis of her bodily performance and intertextual references as her reading history? Writing becomes a dual process of the embodiment of the reader and the author. What emerges is not an “I” and a “you,” but rather “me, not me, and not not me” (Love 25) which repudiates seamless identification with a unitary body and introduces bodily patterns of differing randomness. The book of *The Correspondence Artist* is the body in which wording is the same process as worlding.

Since identities and bodies are slippery and metonymic, they cannot be ultimately ascribed to either Vivian or Browning. An interactive network is formed among Vivian, the paramours, the author-narrator, Browning, and readers, through gestures of touch which open up enclosed frames of different symbolic planes and enable border-crossing in every aspect. To write performatively, therefore, is to access, to invite interaction, and then to write body in co-emergence. When the deployment of property claims returns to an essential body which values disconnection with others as the source of empowerment and self-control, the body written performatively is no longer a domain

which the self occupies, whose integrity is exclusively secured by fixed borders, but rather inhabits and mimics an accretive and prosthetic database which never ceases to unwrite and rewrite itself.

From *The Metaphysical Touch* to *The Correspondence Artist*, the location of identity and the body surpasses the possessive frames of paper and moves into an open, accessible database. Through reading these two e-pistolary novels, this paper traces thematic, formal, and cultural transformations fostered by electronic writings and argues for the necessity of introducing new vocabularies not only for encapsulating newly generated subjectivities and bodies, but also to lessen the inertial force from the old discursive framework under the influence of the metaphysics of presence. However, this paper does not intend to establish a strict opposition between the old and the new, neither to fetishise the model of database, because contemporary electronic writing fundamentally involves interaction between the two strands of perception and practice.

The advantage of using database structure as an epistemological model over territorial language is that by inhabiting a database we are involved in a relational network of writers (or programmers), readers, and intelligent machines beyond a humanist scope. While it grants access and thus higher mutability to the identity and the body, it also uncovers the limitations that restrict our movement by embroiling individual but contextualised elements equally through mapping our relationship with others and our environments. Fed on endless movement within the database tethered to an interactive context, writing exceeds the possessive frame of paper and the body is no longer an object waiting to be signified, but constantly performing, writing, and articulating itself.



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